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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000686

DEPT FOR AF/W DENNISON, AF/RSA, DRL/AE, AND AF/PDPA LISENBY

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SUBJECT: MAKING IT PERSONAL

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¶1. (U) Anticipating the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) November 10th 2008 release of country indicators, Nouakchott issued a release noting that Mauritanian advances outlined in the report had been made during the democratic Abdallahi administration. Mission wished to forestall attempts by the current military administration to take indirect credit for improvements cited by the report. Mauritania's indicators in governing justly and fighting corruption saw marked improvement. While the "Investing in People" category on the whole saw a regression, vaccination and girls education rates doubled and economic freedom also improved. The PAS prepared French and Arabic press release was sent on Sunday, November 9th, the beginning of the Islamic work week in Mauritania.

¶2. (U) The following day, November 10th, the entire MCC press communique was carried in both Arabic and French on websites and in print. According to the headline of the anti-coup French daily Le Renovateur, Abdallahi had been "credited for 'progress' by the MCA" though the body of the article asked why the Ibrahim Index of African Governance presented different results for 2008, which saw Mauritania descend to number 50 from the prior year's rank of 32 among African nations. Aside from this query, reaction to the release, the Mission's position, and the overall MCC scorecard was positive.

¶3. (U) On November 13, however, the pro-coup French daily "Quotidien de Nouakchott" frontpaged the release with the headline "Boulevard's Way!" and an accompanying photo of Ambassador Boulevard. Quotidien pounded the US for using the MCC results for political ends and intruding into Mauritania's internal affairs. See rough translation para 6. It highlighted personal differences between the regime and the US Ambassador and faulted the US for "actions towards the current crisis in Mauritania." It noted that the MCC press release was "simply an attempt to totally disregard the gains made by the putschists of August 6th 2008."

¶4. (U) From time to time since August 6, there have been comments and innuendos that US policy towards post-coup Mauritania has sprung from over zealousness on the part of Ambassador Boulevard and the "Embassy." If it weren't for him, perhaps, the saying would go, all of our problems would be so much smaller. This, however, is the first time these whispers have found their way into print.

¶5. (SBU) Contacts have mentioned that the author, Jedina Ould Deddah is a "cousin" (client) of HSC head Aziz. Other gossip has it that

the article was commissioned by a very irritated junta chief. Be that as it may, the piece is the most anti-American item seen in the media in some months and the first overt step in personalizing USG policy and principle.

¶6. (U) Post Translation: Boulware's Way! The new authorities and the U.S. Ambassador don't get along well. Worse, since August 6th 2007, the American Ambassador, Mark Boulware, who had presented his credentials to ousted president Abdallahi, on 22 November 2007, has multiplied his attacks against the regime. It is therefore clear to all today, that since the beginning of the crisis of August 6th, the U.S. Ambassador has emphasized the stiffening support for the former regime. Some gossips even argue that the visa ban against certain personalities from the military junta and personalities that are affiliated with them, occurred at the insistence of this diplomat who has all the tricks of the State Department in his pocket. Since the beginning of the political crisis, in fact, Boulware gave the impression that he had a personal desire to get even with the new authorities. Some Western diplomats in Nouakchott are cautiously watching the American Ambassador's actions towards the current crisis in Mauritania.

Some of them do not hide their disapproval of "Boulware's Way." Several European diplomatic sources believe in fact that what the U.S. ambassador is doing may add fuel to the fire "instead of favoring serene dialogue and bringing together differing points of view." Some add sarcastically that the diplomat, who was not feeling well in Mauritania, "seeks to provoke becoming persona non grata" to quit this "no mans land." The current authorities do not help him because they are still hoping to save face with the new administration in Washington after President Barack Obama's win. They hope to find common understanding with Obama's new team aboard or buy more time to solve the issue of the overthrow of the former president. Going back to the MCC statement, it is simply an

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attempt to totally neglect the claims of the authors of the putsch of August 6 2008. They had in fact tried to justify their coup by the "unorthodox" management of public affairs under former president. This is an accusation which the former president, currently in detention, wants to deny according to testimony of human rights authors who visited him.

But he can count today on U.S. Ambassador Mark Boulware coming to his rescue, claiming "good management of the country" under the former regime stating that "the fight against corruption" strengthened under President Abdallahi. However, the Ambassador forgets, that under (President Abdulahi's Prime Minister) Zein Ould Zeidane, according to the successive reports of Transparency International, Mauritania experienced its highest level of corruption. With these new results, therefore, it is hard to square the circle with the unfortunate consolation of moving from 123rd place to 115th out of 170 corrupted countries. The statement of the U.S. Embassy which is technically based exclusively on objective information of international institutions could not be more political. It is published at the same time the investigation on the Special Emergency Program comes to an end.

Some people have detected unhealthy practices including those related to management of the U.S. food aid and the purchase of adulterated products. If we can believe that the former president is not directly involved in this case, it is obvious that some of his closest collaborators who had direct responsibility for management are involved and should be answering to the courts. Several articles of local correspondents in Brakna and Tagant have echoed receiving bags of cereal half empty, if not simply unfit for human consumption. Even if "... these figures are not derived from a subjective analysis from the United States Government", they resonate a support of a political agenda, (as did Ambassador David Brown). This agenda is one in which Ambassador Mark Boulware seeks simply to crucify the other party, especially since September 2008. These MCC results no longer benefit our country. End translation.

¶7. (SBU) As noted in other reporting, the concept that the junta would get a better deal with the incoming administration in Washington is held by some senior members of the junta. Reference

to this in the article lends credence to the idea that it was commissioned.

HANKINS